

HOUSE BILL 286

Good Afternoon Madam Chair and members of the committee. I am Representative Clarena M. Brockie from House District 32. Today I bring you HS 32. This bill is at the request of students and the Fort Belknap Indian Community Council and the Little Shell Band of Indians.

This bill passed out of the House with overwhelming support. It passed out of the Education committee without any opposition. There were 9 proponents and 0 opponents.

The current bill provides for various waivers such as those who served in the armed forces of the U.S.; older residents, and a waiver of tuition and fees for "*persons of one-fourth Indian Blood or more, who are bona fide residents of Montana for at least one year prior to enrolling in the Montana University system.*" **Students do not have prove they are members of a tribe or even a tribe from Montana, they only have to prove they are ¼ Indian and residents of Montana.**

There is no guarantee of a fee waiver. In addition to qualify for this waiver, students must: a. complete a FAFSA, and have a financial need; b. Show academic progress;

There are eleven tribes in Montana and seven reservations. These tribes have a special relationship with the state of Montana as well as the U.S. Government through their treaties and other agreements. These treaties include the exchange of land, natural resources and their whole way of life for the health and welfare of these tribes. Including education. Services provided to Native Americans on reservation are based are their enrollment or membership in that tribe. The Indian tribes of Montana do not all have the same requirements for enrollment. At one time ¼ was used as the measuring tool, for many tribes. But some of the tribes of Montana have changed their membership to be less than ¼; for the Cheyenne is has been over twenty years. For the two tribes at Fort Belknap Indian Reservation, it has been over ten years. **These students are not eligible for the tuition waiver.** Because of a shortage in the Tribal Higher Education Program, students are funded only a portion of their unmet need. And with the Pell changes, it has limited the opportunities for the students.

WHY PASS THIS BILL?

By passing this bill the benefit to the State of Montana would be an investment of the future of these young adults and provide them an affordable education.

- These students will attend four year institutions and those institution will receive full time equivalent funding for everyone one of these students;
- Students will contribute to the community of the college of their choice by the rent, utilities, groceries, daycare, gas and taxes they pay;
- Students will get a good education and become productive citizens of Montana;
- There is a shortage of Native American teachers on the reservation, as well as Native American nurses. Those educated in these areas will address an unmet need on and off reservation.
- Montana Indians generally like staying the in community they grew up on it and many return home after their education. Students who receive their teaching degree return home, students who are trained in the medical field return home, helping to address the high unemployment on reservation.